

Testimony not for or against LD 42
to the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
January 27, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Sarah Johnson and I am a resident of Sanford.

I am writing regarding LD 42, An Act Regarding the Bind-over and Detention of Juveniles.

I am neither for nor against this bill.

My issue with this bill is that it stands on the premise that juveniles should be tried as adults. Regardless of where they are ‘housed’ until trial, this is simply inhumane, and contrary to any philosophy of juvenile justice.

We as a state and a nation have had laws in place for decades prohibiting behaviors by age such as age of consent, voting rights and alcohol consumption, primarily based on our knowledge of brain development and maturity. We now have new research from numerous scientific studies that state adolescent brain development continues into the mid twenties. The Sentencing Project 2023 study “Why Youth Incarceration Fails: An Updated Review of the Evidence”

(<https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/why-youth-incarceration-fails-an-updated-review-of-the-evidence/>) summarizes the new data:

“We now know that the human brain does not fully mature until age 25. Recent advances in brain science have confirmed that the sections of the brain dedicated to impulse control, weighing consequences, and regulating emotions are still developing during adolescence, while the part of the brain focused on sensation-seeking and risk taking is unusually active.”

The detailed report describes why youth incarceration does not increase public safety, and

“Incarceration harms young people’s physical and mental health, impedes their educational and career success, and often exposes them to abuse. And the use of confinement is plagued by severe racial and ethnic disparities.”

We have solid and growing Restorative Justice organizations in Maine, along with numerous other advocacy groups who support diversion programs for youth. Continuing archaic and inhumane practices of incarcerating youth in Maine is not helping anyone.

I hope you will consider other legislation to promote youth diversion programs.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sarah Johnson
Sanford, Maine.